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Barron singles out singles as topic for his TV debut

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Former radio reporter/producer extraordinaire Greg Barron is finally getting the chance to prove if he can do with pictures what he did so well with sound.

Before he left Minnesota Public Radio at the start of the year, Barron had accumulated 35 awards, including the Peabody (always referred to in broadcasting as "the prestigious Peabody," the highest award in the industry) and an unprecedented three straight Corporation for Public Broadcasting awards in best-documentary category. But more than that, he had carved a reputation as one of the most imaginative reporters in the business.

Sunday night (9 p.m., Ch. 4) he debuts his highly vaunted talents on a new medium, a WCCO Moore Report called "Single" (followed at 10:30 p.m. with a "town meeting"). Barron's fans won't be disappointed.

It should come as no surprise that what Barron, 35, does best on TV was what he used to do best on radio: He puts the human element back into the news, lifting his report from cut-and-dried cerebral to gut-kicking emotional by pumping vivid, dramatic life into what could have been a lifeless blob of statistics.

The statistics are impressive, of course. There are nearly 60 million single Americans today, more than a third of the adult population.

But Barron, who served as both producer and writer for the show, takes us beyond the numbers to the people behind them. For instance, he introduces us to a pair of singles in their mid 30s, Chris and Greg, who have developed what looks like a close, rewarding relationship. And then, right before our very eyes, the whole thing falls apart. It surprised even Barron.

"We had no idea that was going to happen," he said. "When we discussed Chris and Greg, we thought we would end up with a portrait of two people in a relationship. And then we started to notice the signs."

The TV crew suddenly found themselves in an interesting—albeit, touchy—position. They knew the relationship was breaking up before either Chris or Greg did.

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"We started seeing things, like when we were filming Chris and Greg at the State Fair and Chris holds out her hand to Greg but he doesn't take it," Barron said. "We had arranged for private interviews with each of them, and then things started coming out in the interviews. They had a problem before they really knew they had a problem. It was a big problem, and very quickly everything fell apart."

This is not, however, a nobody-lived-happily-ever-after story. As a matter of fact, both Chris and Greg are quite happy when we last see them. The image that all singles are isolated in miserable loneliness and frustration is a concept that Barron, himself single, wants to eradicate.

"I feel very strongly about all the stereotypes there are about singles," he said. And he means *all* the stereotypes, those that say singles are unhappy in their solitude as well as those that say they are ecstatically wild and carefree. "I wanted to point out that there are good aspects to being single and difficult aspects to being single."

Barron chose singles as his first TV project because of those stereotypes and the pressures they put on singles, he said. So confusing are all the feelings about singles, Dave Moore points out during the report, that "singles usually are even misunderstood by themselves."

"I've seen a lot of people go through problems with being single," Barron said. "I felt very strongly that they needed to know that this is a common human experience. I wanted to hold up a mirror so they could see that they are not alone."

But he is adamant that the show is not for singles only.

"Virtually everyone I know spends time talking about their personal relationships," he said. "I think that there are a lot of people who are wondering if they wouldn't rather be single, and wonder what it's like. And I think there are a lot of parents who want to understand why so many children of the baby boom generation are remaining single."

It was an ambitious project, he admits.

"I didn't realize how ambitious it was when I started," he said. "I started to realize that it was virtually impossible to do everything I wanted to do in eight to 10 weeks. We ended up bringing in a whole second (production) team, the first time this station has done that."

He also was slowed by his unfamiliarity with his new medium.

"I was surprised," he admitted. "Video is much more demanding than film in terms of lighting conditions. I learned how much of a struggle it is to shoot a documentary indoors. And I learned that it takes a long time before the lights and the camera disappear and the subjects start to open up."

But he learned his lessons well. Those who enjoyed his radio reports would do well to look him up in his new home.